



# CONGRESSMAN HENRY A. WAXMAN NEWS

2444 RAYBURN H.O.B  
8425 WEST 3rd STREET

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515  
LOS ANGELES, CALIF. 90048

202-225-3976  
213-651-1040

CAPITOL SPOTLIGHT  
by HENRY A. WAXMAN  
(D-Los Angeles)

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## PASSOVER THOUGHTS ON SOVIET JEWRY

For well over a decade, I have devoted this column to Soviet Jewry twice a year--during the High Holy Day season and during the Passover season.

I have never been as discouraged and frightened as I am now. All the news pertaining to Jews in the Soviet Union is negative. The ascension of Yuri Andropov to the pinnacle of power in the USSR has been accompanied by a sharp deterioration in the position of Jews.

Current Soviet policy traps the Jewish population between oppression at home and an almost complete shut-down of emigration.

I recently received a shocking report from my good friend, Si Frumkin, one of the leaders in the struggle for Soviet Jewry. Si told me that he has heard more and more accounts of Soviet Jews afraid to maintain contact with the West.

For more than a decade, it has been axiomatic that refuseniks and other prominent Soviet Jews thrive on communications with people sympathetic to their cause and fighting on their behalf in the United States. Temples organize phone calls to families they have "adopted"; student groups conduct mass mailings of New Year cards to Soviet Jews; elected officials and leaders of the movement for Soviet Jewry conduct extensive correspondence with Jews in the Soviet Union.

More and More, Soviet Jews are terrified of the consequences of being known to the KGB as having contacts in the United States.

The sanctions for violating the regime's anti-Semitic policies have always been serious. However, in recent months, the more stringent punishments appear to be applied with ever greater frequency.

What might be done to a Soviet Jew who applies to emigrate to Israel, or who keeps publications on Jewish topics in his apartment, or who attempts to maintain regular mail or telephone connections with friends or family outside the USSR?

Common punishments include the loss of telephone service, confiscation of mail, the loss of employment, and the denial of earned promotions. One of the most common sanctions is to deny university and technical school admittance to the children of those who have violated the Soviet policy. Thus, a Soviet Jew does not merely take risks for himself or herself, but exposes his entire family--including small children-- to eventual discrimination and punishment.

.....MORE.....MORE.....MORE.....

Certain individuals, such as Ida Nudel, are singled out as examples and subjected to the full range of afflictions the government is capable of imposing. Ida Nudel has been jailed, beaten, starved, exiled to a remote region, and, to this very day, been denied the right to live in her home community of Moscow.

For years, the KGB conducted a systematic campaign to stop all teaching of Hebrew and gathering of Jewish cultural groups. In defiance, Soviet Jews attending such "underground" classes increased in number and dedication. Now, the crackdown on Hebrew teaching has been intensified. Yosef Begun who has already served two terms of imprisonment and exile for the "crime" of teaching Hebrew, has been arrested for a third time and is being held incommunicado in Vladimir Prison on charges of "treason and anti-Soviet agitation". Hebrew is in the curriculum of major Soviet universities for non-Jews as training for KGB agents. Yosef Begun is guilty of one thing--trying to legitimize under Soviet law the teaching of Hebrew to Jews. The future of all Jewish cultural activity in the Soviet Union is tied to the fate of Yosef Begun.

Passover is "the Season of Our Liberation". It is a time of joy, hope, and confidence that as God delivered us from Egyptian bondage, so will He deliver us from latter day oppressors. This hope has been maintained in the worst conditions imaginable. Prisoners in Auschwitz obtained tiny amounts of flour and baked matzos. They conducted secret Seder rites using weak tea instead of wine for the Four Cups.

We in the United States must keep up our hopes for Soviet Jewry and maintain their confidence that their cause, though enormously difficult, is by no means hopeless.

I personally believe that the United States has not begun to exercise the leverage over the Soviet Union available to us with the trade weapon. We have not yet established a convincing link between our moral convictions on human rights in the Soviet Union and our role as incomparable merchants of grain, computers, and the full range of "high technology" which the Russians so desperately need and want. American consumers must use their buying power to bring pressure against companies who do business with the Soviet Union without regard to the moral dimension.

My family and I wish all our friends and constituents a joyous Passover. I pray that we Jews fortunate enough to live in a land of tremendous freedom and opportunity will use this privilege to enrich our own Jewish lives, to struggle for Jews around the world who need our help, and to fulfill our historic mission of proudly sanctifying human life and human liberty everywhere.